

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000606

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: TFI201: YEMEN - ROYG WALKING A TIGHTROPE

REF: A. SANAA 593

[B](#). SANAA 585

[C](#). SANAA 338

[D](#). SANAA 255

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alan G. Misenheimer for Reasons
1.5 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: ROYG is determined to stay ahead of regional and Yemeni opinion and maintain its bilateral relations with the U.S. Yemeni leadership continues to oscillate between condemnation of the U.S. for the war in Iraq and its stated commitment to protect foreigners, particularly Americans, and continue CT cooperation in Yemen.
End summary.

PRE-WAR: A TIME OF RHETORIC

[2](#). (C) Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, ROYG, like many of its Arab neighbors, expressed its opposition to the use of force in Iraq and the importance of Iraqi compliance with the inspection regime. President Saleh, FM Qirbi, and other senior officials availed themselves of the media and numerous regional and international conferences, including the Arab League, OIC, and the NAM summits, to clarify and expand upon the ROYG position. Specifically, FM Qirbi noted that the U.S. and its allies should not be hasty in the use of military force (ref C), and, on February 8, predicted that war in Iraq would "destabilize the delicate situation" in the region (ref D).

[3](#). (C) ROYG organized a series of internal demonstrations to signal their support for the people of Iraq, the inspection program, and opposition to the use of force. Orderly and non-violent, these demonstrations resembled political rallies, with pictures of President Saleh rather than Saddam.

[4](#). (S/NF) Privately, the same senior officials characterized U.S.-Yemen relations as "good" and "very important." Behind closed doors, ROYG officials never objected to, and even welcomed, regime change, but were concerned about the commencement of hostilities so close to Yemen's April 27 parliamentary elections and U.S. plans for a "new" Iraq. President Saleh positioned himself and his party in an effort designed to limit the influence of extremist factions, both political and Islamic.

HOSTILITIES COMMENCE

[5](#). (C) At the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq, ROYG statements were low-key and non-confrontational (ref A). ROYG called for the cessation of hostilities in Iraq and declared ROYG commitment to a peaceful resolution through legitimate channels -- namely the UN, the Arab League, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

UNDER PRESSURE FROM GOI, ROYG CHANGES TACK

[6](#). (C) ROYG is under diplomatic and media pressure by the Iraqi government. Iraqi VP Taha Ramadan followed his 3/23 statement (ref B) in which he described Yemen and its government as hopeless, with a 3/25 statement (text in para 10) addressing the Arab regimes who are "aiding the aggressors", namely Yemen. Ramadan asked why these regimes do not "demand the closure of the U.S. and British embassies instead of killing their own people when they head for these embassies to demonstrate" -- another direct reference to the violent demonstration on 3/21 near U.S. Embassy Sana'a.

[7](#). (C) In a March 25 response President Saleh strengthened his previously low-key comments saying "there is no justification for the American and British aggression against Iraq, it is against every resolution in international law..." Saleh also accused the U.S. of allowing Israel to take "advantage of the aggression against Iraq to carry out its own terrorism campaign against the Palestinian people."

[8](#). (C) During a 3/25 meeting between ROYG Speaker of Parliament Abdallah Bin-Husayn Al-Ahmar and the Iraqi Charge

d'Affaires to Yemen, Husayn Sadiq Khalifa, Al-Ahmar expressed what he declared as the attitude of Yemeni leadership, government, and people: that the "Anglo-American aggression" against Iraq is considered aggression against the whole Arab and Islamic community. This is an election year and Al-Ahmar's comments are similar to statements made by other Yemeni officials who are trying to hold on to their constituencies in the tide of emotions sweeping the region since the beginning of the war. This tone is also an attempt to bolster Yemen's Arab and Islamic credentials during this time of regional uncertainty.

ULEMA STATEMENT

19. (C) In the midst of increasing ROYG rhetoric, the Yemeni Ulema (council of religious scholars) released a relatively balanced statement after its March 24th session. The meeting's stated purpose was "to review the unjust aggressive war that is being waged against the Iraqi Arab and Muslim people by the leadership of the United States and its ally Britain, and those behind them." The Ulema condemned the unjust aggression and called for a boycott of goods from the aggressor states, a breaking of the Iraqi blockade, and the provision of material and moral support to Iraq and Palestine. However, the last paragraph of their statement entreated Yemenis to continue expressing opinions by peaceful means and to refrain from damaging public or private property, even if it belongs to the citizens of aggressor states.

110. (C) The Ulema were tapped as leaders of a peaceful, government-organized anti-war march on March 27. This reflects Saleh's ongoing effort to ensure that the Islamist opposition party, Islah, cannot use the war as an electoral issue against the ruling party. The 3/27 march was a transparent attempt to pre-empt possible unauthorized demonstrations following Friday prayers on March 28. That attempt was successful and there were no demonstrations on 3/28.

EXCERPTS OF THE IRAQI VP'S PRESS CONFERENCE

111. (U) Excerpts from Iraqi Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan's March 25 news conference:

-- Why do the Arabs supply the aggressors oil to operate their war machine? Why don't they stop supplying oil to the states of aggression? Why don't they close their airspace and land and sea routes to prevent the activities of the states of aggression?

-- Why don't they demand the closure of the U.S. and British embassies instead of killing their own people when they head for these embassies to demonstrate? They defend the safety and security of the personnel at the embassies of the aggressors but do not give a damn or offer anything to protect the safety and security of the Iraqi people. They may not sever diplomatic relations because they are incapable of doing so. But they should tell them: Withdraw the personnel at your embassies because we cannot be responsible for their security.

End text.

HULL